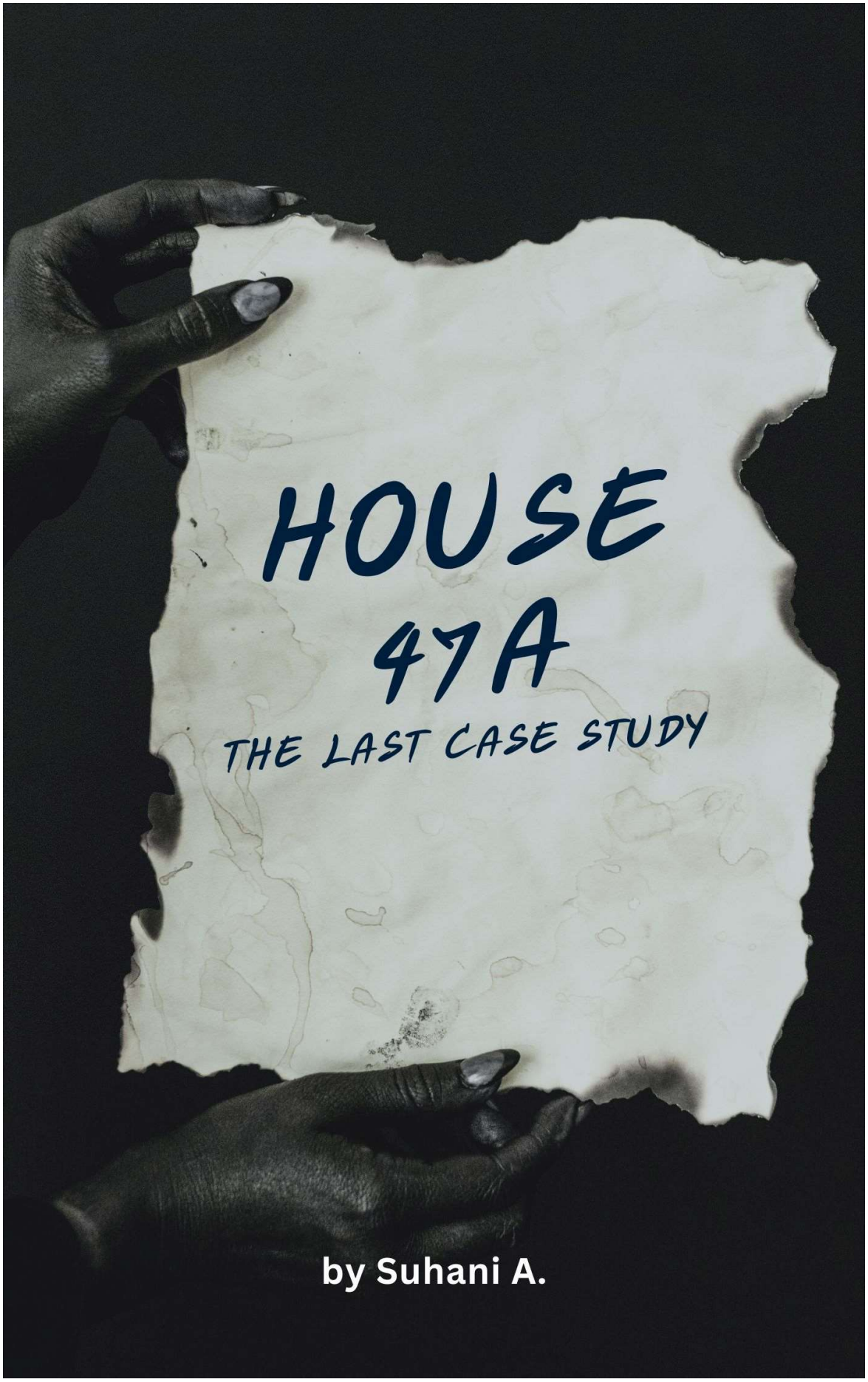
HOUSE
47A
THE LAST CASE STUDY
by Suhani A.

Prologue

I have lived in Rajdhani Enclave ever since I was a kid. My parents bought a flat here when I was in the 5th standard, and we moved away from my father's family soon after. My grandmother would tell you that the real reason we moved was because it was a "carefully planned tactic" by my mother to "manipulate and control" my father into separating from her.

But the real reason was much simpler:
my school was closer to Rajdhani Enclave, and this area was not congested like Laxmi Nagar, where even reversing your car required divine intervention.

My father still jokes that he became an expert driver only because he trained by driving in *Laxmi Nagar ki galiyaa* (Streets of Laxmi Nagar).

Besides, moving away was not really a big deal either. Our flat is barely a 10-minute drive from where my father's family lives.

Anyway, I don't really like my grandmother. Whenever we visit, she gives me the same speech:

"Riya, I told you not to become a journalist. Now look, you have to run around so much for your job. Which man will want to marry you? Girls are gold, and gold should be protected and kept inside a locker."

She's a victim of patriarchy who believes a working woman brings negative energy into a house.

But despite all her lectures and emotional blackmail, I love my work.
Investigating, understanding people, putting the truth together and showing it to the world; it makes me feel like I'm doing something that matters. Also, it's an escape from the locker my grandmother wants to put me in.

And I had never imagined that the biggest story of my life would begin only nine buildings away from my own house.

But I didn't actually witness the beginning of it.
When everything happened, I was asleep, dreaming of a deadline I'd missed and my editor yelling at me, until a giraffe, who was also my friend, appeared and stomped on her.

When I finally woke up around 7:30 and checked my phone, I saw a message in my building WhatsApp group:

"Police outside 47A. Something serious. Do not crowd the area."

At first, I didn't think much of it.
People in this colony panic over everything.
The last time police were called was because of stray dogs fighting.
Before that, water tankers arriving late.
And before that, someone's car getting scratched.

But then the messages kept coming.

“Ambulance.”
“Two bodies.”
“Arora family.”

I sat up straight.

I knew the Aroras.
Not personally, but the way everyone in a colony knows each other.
Through gossip, half-truths, and stories Aunty No. 8 hears from Aunty No. 3.

I knew the popular version:
how the mother was a Muslim divorcee who “married a Hindu man for his money,”
even though she earned more than him.
How the boy was from her previous marriage.
How the couple didn’t have children together.

It was the kind of information that fuels desi gossip circuits, not actual knowledge.

I brushed my teeth in a hurry, grabbed my notepad (yes, I still use pen and paper. Old habits, don’t judge me), and walked downstairs.

The morning air felt heavy, as if it was holding something it didn’t want to say out loud.

A few neighbours were already gathered near 47A, speaking in hushed voices.
No one dared to go too close.
A policeman stood at the gate, blocking entry.
The doors of the house were sealed, curtains drawn.
the kind of stillness that doesn’t belong in a place where two people lived just hours ago.

I asked the first person I recognized, “What happened?”

She lowered her voice, as if the walls could still hear her.

“Mahendra and… and the boy. Both gone.”

Gone.
That was the word she used.

Not dead.
Not murdered.
Just gone.

I felt something shift inside me.
Curiosity at first, then confusion, then a sense of responsibility I couldn’t quite explain.

Two people had died nine buildings away from where I slept peacefully through the night.
And no one knew how.
Or why.
Or who might still be involved.

I didn’t know then that I would spend months untangling the truth.
That this case would pull apart the quiet fabric of our colony thread by thread.
That nothing about the Arora family was as simple as it looked from the outside.

All I knew was this:
The story had already begun.
And somehow, I was already part of it.

Part 1: Murder

Murder-
Murder is the unlawful and intentional killing of a human being by another human being.

Synonyms-

- Homicide (general)
- Slaying
- Killing
- Assassination (when targeted, usually public figures)
- Manslaughter (related but not identical, usually without intent)
- Taking a life
- Dispatching (rare/figurative)

How to use it in a Sentence-
The detective journalist worked tirelessly to uncover the truth behind the mysterious murder that shocked the entire town.

The thing about colonies like ours is that everyone thinks they know everyone.
But most of what they "know" is gossip that is just, "Sharma ji saw this and told Aggarwal ji, who told his Mrs, who told Gupta ji's wife, who told me."

I didn't want that.
If I was going to understand what happened inside 47A, I needed real information.

So, after the morning panic settled, I started doing what journalists like me do best.

I walked.

Not in a dramatic detective way.
Just casually, like a girl taking a morning stroll after two deaths occurred nine buildings away.
People don't suspect you're digging for information when you walk slowly.

The guard was the first person I approached.
Not the night guard—he was probably asleep somewhere, as usual—but the morning one.

"They were good people… I wonder what happened to them…" I said casually.

He straightened immediately.
Guards love feeling useful.

"Madam, they were normal people. Teacher and lawyer. That's all…" he hesitated, lowering his voice, "Their home seemed peaceful, but did you know, the poor boy, Arbab, was found dating Chugh ji's daughter? He was saying he will kill that boy if he sees him near the daughter again."

Interesting.

I knew "Chugh ji" meant Mohit Chugh, the one who lived in the next street, house 53A. His daughter was Diya Chugh, who was in the same school as Arbab, the school I went to too, and was nearby, Gurukshetra Pvt. School.

Next, I stopped at the small grocery shop near the gate.
The uncle there sees everything but pretends to see nothing.

He smiled a little too eagerly when I asked about the Aroras.

"They were good people, but from different worlds…"

"What do you mean?"

"A Hindu man dating a Muslim divorcee. Does it make any sense? She probably just trapped him. I know who killed them. It was her ex-husband; this murder was committed by him only. Maybe she was also an accomplice. You really can't trust people of her kind, snakes who kill their own child."

I had heard that before.

I walked further.
Near the playground, two aunties were doing what they do best: spreading information under the guise of exercise. I caught fragments of their conversation, bitter, hushed syllables about Anha's ex-husband, Tariq. They relished the scandal: he was her cousin, and the marriage had imploded when he took a second wife behind her back. To the aunties, the tragedy at 47A wasn't just a crime; it was "karma" for a messy past.

I made mental notes and moved toward the bakery where schoolchildren stop on their way home.
A few teenagers were talking under the shade.
When I casually mentioned Arbab's name, their conversation froze.

One of them, a girl with nervous energy, said, "He used to eat lunch alone after Diya and him broke up."

Another boy added, "People bullied him. Religion stuff… Things about his biological father… you know how boys are."

I did know.
Teenage boys can be cruel in ways adults forget.

Piece by piece, the image was forming.

I returned home, sat at my dining table, opened my laptop, and began compiling everything I'd gathered so far into a structure that made sense.

Because if there was one thing I trusted more than people, it was data.

And this is what it looked like.

RIYA'S NOTES — PRELIMINARY REPORT (DAY ONE)

(Unpublished working draft - based only on morning field conversations)

Date: 17 July
Time: 12:30 p.m.
Location: Rajdhani Enclave
Subject: Arora Family (47A)

1. BASIC FAMILY DETAILS (As confirmed by multiple neighbours)

A. Mahendra Arora (Step-Father, deceased/murdered)
- Occupation: Art teacher at Gurudev International School.
- Described as polite and soft-spoken.
- Kept mostly to himself but always greeted neighbours.
- Regular routine: left around 7:30 a.m., returned before evening.
- No known conflicts with anyone in the colony.

B. Anha Syed (Mother)
- Criminal lawyer.
- Previously divorced (Ex-Husband and cousin: Tariq Syed; Reason for divorce: Second marriage by Tariq without Anha's consent; Kids: Arbab)
- Financially independent, well-respected in her profession.
- Usually seen in a hurry, work-heavy schedule.
- Perception divided:
  Some admire her confidence; others judge her background (bias clearly present).
- Alibi: At the time of the murder, was asleep.

C. Arbab (Son, deceased/murdered)
- 17 years old, student at Gurukshetra Pvt School.
- Generally quiet, kept to himself.
- In a relationship with Diya Chugh (53A) until recently.
- After breakup, reportedly kept more distance from classmates.
- Some students mention he faced teasing/bullying, but details unclear.

2. RECENT EVENTS MENTIONED BY RESIDENTS

A. Relationship issue
- Confirmed that Arbab and Diya broke up.
- Guard mentioned Diya's father warning Arbab to stay away.
  → Needs verification (could be exaggerated).

B. Home environment
- Most neighbours describe the family as "normal," "quiet," "private."
- No one reported hearing fights or disturbances.
- No visible signs of major conflict.

C. Social presence
- The family did not attend colony gatherings often, but this is common for working households.
- Interactions were polite but limited.

3. COMMUNITY TALK (Filtered and Unverified)
(Not factual — included only to track narrative trends)

- Some neighbours speculate about Anha's ex-husband.
- Some assume interfaith marriage caused tension.
- Some express bias about Anha being a working woman/muslim woman married to hindu man/divorcee.
- None of these claims have evidence.

Most opinions are emotional or prejudiced, not informative.

4. FIRST IMPRESSIONS FROM STUDENTS

- Arbab ate lunch alone recently (post-breakup).
- A few classmates say he was bullied "sometimes".

- No mention of major fights or behavioural issues at school.

5. NEUTRAL OBSERVATIONS (My own)

- Police sealed the house quickly; officers tight-lipped.
- No chaos or signs of struggle visible from outside.
- Community unusually quiet, shock more than fear.

6. QUESTIONS TO FOLLOW UP

1. How long were Arbab and Diya together, and why did they break up?
2. Did Mohit Chugh actually confront or threaten Arbab, or is this just guard gossip?
3. Was Arbab struggling at school academically or socially beyond what students mentioned?
4. What were Mahendra and Anha like at school/work according to colleagues?
5. Did anyone in the colony notice changes in the family's routine recently?
6. Did anyone hear or see anything unusual during the night (1–5 a.m.)?
7. How involved was Anha in Arbab's daily life, given her demanding job?
8. Did Arbab have close friends anywhere outside school/colony?

EARLY SUMMARY (Day One):
The Aroras appear to have been a quiet, private family with no publicly known conflicts.
Most information circulating right now is speculative or influenced by bias.
Nothing concrete points in any direction yet.

End of Report Day One

Part-2: Manipulation

Manipulation-
Manipulation is the act of influencing, controlling, or handling someone or something, often in a clever, unfair, or deceptive way to achieve a desired outcome.

Synonyms-

- Control
- Influence
- Exploitation
- Maneuvering
- Deception
- Scheming
- Handling (neutral)
- Orchestration

Sentence-
The decision was not truly their own; it was the result of subtle manipulation by those they trusted.

The first place I went after finishing my notes was Gurukshetra Pvt School.
I'd walked through these gates more than a hundred times as a student, but that morning they felt unfamiliar, like a place I remembered but no longer fit into.

They directed me to Arbab's class teacher and maths teacher, Mrs. Rachna Gupta, a woman I vaguely remembered from my own school days. She had the same angry eyes that made you sit straighter without realizing it.

"Ma'am," I said gently, "I'm not here to sensationalize anything. I just want to understand who he was."

She exhaled, long and shaky, then gestured for me to sit. Her expression turned soft, a look I never expected from her.

"Arbab was a very kind boy," she began. "Soft-spoken. Always respectful. He would stand up when someone entered the room. Hardly any students do that anymore."

I nodded, letting her talk at her own pace.

"He wasn't a topper," she continued, "but he wasn't weak either. Average academically, but consistent. He tried. And that means something at this age."

"What about outside studies?" I asked.

Her face softened for the first time.
"Oh, he was wonderful at football. Really wonderful. He'd played for the school team a few times. The coach thought he could go far if he kept training."

A small, sad smile.
"A quiet child, but with a bright future. That's what all of us believed."

"Did anything change recently?" I asked.

She hesitated.
"He became quieter. More withdrawn. I assumed it was exam stress or… teenage things. Boys go through phases and don't always talk about them."

Her voice wavered at the end.

"Thank you," I said softly. "This helps."

"Please write the truth," she replied. "He deserves that much."

I promised her I would.

I went outside the building, and in the school ground I found Diya sitting on a cracked concrete bench behind the handball court, with a novel in her hand that she was not reading. She looked like someone who hadn't slept, eaten, or decided how she was supposed to feel.

"Diya?" I said softly.

She didn't jump.
She closed her book and stared at me as if I were interrupting a thought she didn't want to admit she was having.
"You're the journalist," she murmured.
"I'm not here to write anything sensational," I told her. "I just want to understand him. And you."
A long, shaky breath. Then she nodded, but her hands were twisted so tightly in her lap that her knuckles were white.
"Why did you and Arbab break up?" I asked.
She didn't answer immediately.
Instead, she laughed, short and brittle, the kind of laugh that only happens when someone has run out of tears before they ran out of pain.
"It wasn't because we stopped caring," she said quietly. "It was because caring wasn't enough."
I waited, letting the silence give her permission.
"One night," she began, "I was texting him after telling my parents I'd gone to sleep. My dad checked on me. Saw my phone… saw his name."
Her throat tightened.
"He made me block him. Right there. Told me if I talked to him again, he'd pull me out of school and get me married."
"That's illegal," I whispered.
"So?" she said flatly. "Dads like mine don't need legality. They just need people who won't question them."
She looked at me and for a moment I saw something raw and terrified under all the bravado.
"But don't pity me," she added sharply. "Or him. We were going to break up anyway."
That wasn't anger.
That was protection.
Protection of something she didn't want me to touch.
"Why do you say that?" I asked.
She stared at the ground.
"He was talking to other people. This girl from his gym. Alizey. He sent her reels, jokes… he liked her. Not in a cheating way but…"
Her voice dropped.
"She made him feel good. Not like me. I made everything hard."
There it was, the guilt she didn't know how to hold.
"And there was also another woman," she whispered. "Older."
She bit her lip until it turned white.
"People say they… talked about things. Dirty things."
My stomach tightened.
"How old was she?"
"I don't know. Above forty maybe. But…"
She looked up at me, eyes almost pleading.
"But she was good for him."
"What?" I blinked.
"She comforted him," Diya insisted. "He was lonely. You don't get it. Sometimes older people *do* understand better. Maybe she cared for him more than anyone else."
"Diya," I said gently, alarmed, "that's grooming."
She flinched as if I'd slapped her.
"No," she snapped. "No, it's not. He wasn't a baby. He knew what he was doing."
"He's seventeen."

“And? He was almost eighteen. He wasn’t stupid. He liked her.”
“That doesn’t make it okay.”
“Why?” she demanded, voice rising. “Why does everyone think he needed protecting? He hated being treated like a child. She made him feel… wanted. Seen. Like he mattered.”
Her voice broke on the last word.
I didn’t interrupt.
Not because I agreed, but because I suddenly realized something:
Diya wasn’t defending the older woman.
She was defending **herself**; her feelings, her heartbreak, her inability to give him what she thought someone else could.
And the way she spoke…
The way she justified exploitation…
Something was wrong.
Not with the story…
with *her*.
She was hurting in a way she didn’t understand.
“Diya,” I said softly, “none of this was your fault.”
She looked at me sharply, almost offended.
“Don’t say that,” she whispered. “Please. Don’t make it sound like he needed saving. He wasn’t weak.”
And just like that, she shut down completely.
I stood up slowly. I checked the time and it was 1:50pm. The school day was about to end, at 2:00pm.
“The school is about to end. Let me walk you home.” I said.
This time she didn’t argue.
She just stood, wiped her face roughly, and walked beside me in silence.
Halfway to her street, she whispered:
“He wasn’t wrong for wanting… comfort. You know? People act like something evil happened. But maybe… maybe he just needed someone. Anyone.”
I didn’t have an answer.
Not one she was ready to hear.
When I left her at her gate, she didn’t look back.
And for the first time since I started investigating, I felt a chill.
Not because of what happened to Arbab.
But because of what Diya believed was *normal*.
It wasn’t normal.
None of this was normal.
Which meant something ugly was hiding under all this grief;
and I had just touched the edge of it.

Part-3: Grooming

Grooming-
Grooming is the process of building trust and an emotional connection with someone (often a minor) with the hidden intention of manipulating, exploiting, or abusing them. It can also refer to preparing or training someone for a particular role, but the harmful meaning is more commonly highlighted in safety contexts.

Synonyms-

- Conditioning
- Manipulative bonding
- Entrapment
- Coercive persuasion
- Predatory preparation

(Neutral synonyms for the non-harmful meaning: training, preparing, coaching.)

Sentence-
Children were advised to learn what grooming is so they could better protect themselves.

I returned to Gurukshetra Pvt School the next morning, heavy with everything Diya had told me.
The school felt quieter today, like everyone was walking around a bruise they didn't want to press.

I found Mrs. Rachna in the staff corridor.

"Ma'am," I said gently, "can I make a suggestion?"

She looked exhausted; grief wears itself differently on teachers.

"What is it, Riya?"

"Could you hold a session with the kids about grooming? Just… basic awareness. They talk like they know things, but they really don't."

Something flickered in her eyes: recognition, maybe fear.

"Yes," she said after a moment. "I think that's… necessary."

The counsellor joined within minutes, and soon Class 11 and 12 students were gathered in a circle.
I stood at the back, half observer, half detective.

The moment the counsellor started explaining how adults can cross boundaries with minors, the room shifted.

Some boys tried to hide smirks.
Some girls folded their arms.
A few looked genuinely confused.

And Diya…
Diya sat still, too still, her face unreadable.

Then I heard whispering from the back, two boys snickering like everything was a joke.

"Diya ka toh roz school ke baahar wait karta tha woh uncle… kaunsa tha?"
("That uncle used to wait for Diya outside school almost every day… what was his name?")

"Arre, woh… Tariq uncle. Maine khud dekha school ke baahar."
("Oh, yeah… Tariq uncle. I saw him myself outside the school.")

My blood ran cold.

Another boy chimed in, casual as ever:

"Haan, aur Diya usse baat karti thi gate ke paas. Maybe ussi ne kuch-"
("Yeah, and Diya used to talk to him near the gate. Maybe he's the one who-")

I turned sharply.

“What did you just say?”

The boys froze like cornered animals.

“I-I didn’t mean anything,” one stammered. “We just… saw her talking to him sometimes. After school. That’s all.”

What…? I just gazed, confused.

So, Tariq wasn’t just wandering near the colony at night.
He had been around the school too.
For Diya.

My phone buzzed.

A local news push notification lit the screen:

BREAKING: CCTV Footage Reveals Father of Victim Present Near Crime Scene- Tariq Syed Taken in For Questioning

And below that, a headline already blowing things out of proportion:

“Prime Suspect Detained in Rajdhani Enclave Double Murder!”

I felt my stomach clench. After doing some research from more reliable sources, I found that he wasn’t “detained,” just taken in for questioning.

But media loved a villain.

Especially one already wrapped in community prejudice.

Before I could process any of it, someone tapped my arm.

It was Diya.

Her voice was a whisper sharpened by fear.

“Didi… can we talk? Please?”

We stepped aside behind the auditorium block, away from staring eyes.

Her face was pale, her hands shaking.

“Didi, I heard you watching the news… just… he didn’t kill them,” she said immediately. “Please believe me.”

My heart dropped.

“Tariq?” I asked.

She nodded desperately.

“He only came to the colony that night… because of me.”

“What?”

She looked away, ashamed.

“I used to talk to him. After school. Sometimes near the gate. He just… listened to me. I didn’t have anyone else.”

That was not good. Not good at all.

“Diya, he’s a grown man,” I said slowly.

“He wasn’t being weird!” she insisted. “He was just…kind. He didn’t shout at me like my father. He asked me how I was. He told me things get better. He didn’t… cross any lines.”

Her definition of “line” felt dangerously vague.

“Diya,” I said softly, “why did he come that night?”

She exhaled shakily.

“I told him to come near my balcony. So we could talk. I didn’t want my father to hear.”

The same chill from yesterday crawled up my spine.

“So he wasn’t there for… anyone else?”

“No! He wasn’t stalking anyone. He wasn’t angry with Arbab. He wasn’t even thinking about him. He came because I asked him to. And now everyone thinks he’s a murderer.”

She started crying quietly. Not loud sobs, but the silent, painful kind people hide.

“I know he didn’t kill them,” she whispered. “He didn’t. He was… just trying to help me.”

A man in his forties “helping” a vulnerable seventeen-year-old girl talk to him in secret at night.

I wanted to scream.

Instead, I touched her shoulder gently.

“Diya… do you trust me?”

She nodded.

“Then let me write the truth. Even if it’s complicated.”

But inside, I was torn apart.

Because if Tariq didn’t kill Mahendra and Arbab…

Someone else did.

And worse… Tariq was still a danger.

Just not in the way the police thought.

RIYA’S NOTES — FIELD REPORT 02 (DAY TWO)

Compiled after school visit + informal student interviews

Date: 18 July
Key Developments:

1. Teacher Feedback
- Arbab described as:
  - kind
  - respectful
  - average student / excellent at football
  - introverted, growing quieter recently
- No behavioural issues reported.

2. Grooming Awareness Session
Observations:
- Students largely unaware of grooming concepts.
- Several boys trivialized the topic.
- Diya visibly distressed but silent.
- Indicates emotional vulnerability + possible confusion about boundaries.

3. New Information from Students
- Multiple students report seeing Diya talking to *Tariq Syed* (Arbab’s biological father) after school.
- Meetings appeared casual and repeated.
- Students unaware of his identity or relevance to the case.

4. Media Escalation
- CCTV shows Tariq near the colony at night → police questioning him.
- Media presenting it as “detainment/arrest.”
- Technically NOT arrested—still a suspect, not proven.

5. Diya’s Clarification
- Says she invited Tariq near her balcony the night of the murders.
- Claims he came only to talk to her, not related to Arora family.

- Insists he is innocent of the crime.
- Shows strong emotional attachment/trust toward him.

Red Flags:
- Diya's comfort with an older man (40s) is concerning.
- Her defense of him borders on protective, possibly manipulated.
- Emphasizes he "listened" and "understood" her → grooming indicators.

6. Riya's Preliminary Assessment
- Tariq may not be the murderer.
- But his relationship with Diya is *highly inappropriate*.
- Need to determine:
  - how long they've been talking
  - nature of conversations
  - whether Diya is aware of grooming dynamics
- Also raises possibility that Tariq was at the colony for personal reasons, not criminal intent.

Next Steps / Questions
1. What exactly happened between Diya and Tariq?
2. Why was Arbab growing quieter before his death?
3. Are there other adults involved in blurred boundaries with minors?
4. If Tariq didn't kill them, then who did—and why?

End of Field Report 02

After I finished writing, I stared at my cursor blinking on the screen. To clear Tariq's name, I'd have to expose Diya. I'd have to tell the world, and the police, that he wasn't a killer, just a man preying on a lonely girl's need for a father figure.

If I spoke up, I'd be the hero who found the "truth." But I'd also be the person who handed a predator his get-out-of-jail-free card. Was the "Truth" worth the cost of Diya's future? My editor would say yes. My conscience wasn't so sure.

Part-4: Spectacle

Spectacle-
A public display or event that attracts attention, often because it is dramatic, shocking, or sensational. While a spectacle can be entertaining or impressive, it is frequently used to describe situations where serious matters are turned into public performances, prioritizing attention over truth or sensitivity.

Synonyms-
• Show
• Display
• Sensation
• Media circus
• Public drama

Sentence-
The investigation quickly turned into a spectacle, where grief became footage and suspicion became a headline.

Tariq Syed lived in an old house just a little away from Jama Masjid, a place I hadn't visited since I was in college.
His house blended in with most houses in that area: washed-out paint, open drains, stray cats on half-broken staircases.

But today it had something new.

Chaos.

A swarm of journalists crowded the entrance, microphones held high like weapons.
Police tape wrapped around the staircase railings.
Three officers blocked the gate with bored faces that pretended not to notice the cameras blinding them.

And in the middle of all this, a woman crying so loudly the whole lane could hear.

Zainab Khan.
Tariq's wife.

I moved closer, pushing through the cluster of reporters.
But before I could even pretend to be invisible, an officer held up a hand.

"Press not allowed. Please leave."

"I'm just-"

"No exceptions."

He didn't even look at me while denying me entry.

Typical.

Another officer came down the stairs carrying a white box labeled **FORENSIC KIT**.
A doctor in gloves followed him, and the journalists surged forward like vultures spotting fresh meat.

"Sir! Sir! What did you find inside?"
"Is it true the blood matches the victims?"
"Has Tariq confessed?"

The inspector didn't answer any of them.
He kept his eyes on the ground, pushing through the crowd with the indifference of someone used to ignoring noise.

"Madam, please move aside," he said as he passed me.

But Zainab didn't ignore anyone.

She lunged forward and grabbed a female reporter's wrist, almost stumbling as she spoke.

“My husband is innocent! Innocent!” she cried.
“Tariq didn’t kill anyone! They found blood on his shirt... but that doesn’t mean anything! He didn’t do it!”

Her voice cracked, high and desperate.

The officers tried to pull her back.

“Madam, stop talking to them!”

“No!” she shouted, wrenching her arm free. “They are lying! They are saying the blood is of that boy and the father! But Tariq didn’t do anything!”

A ripple moved through the journalists.

Mahendra and Arbab.

Their names hung in the air like dust.

I felt myself freeze.

Blood on Tariq’s shirt.
Matching the victims?

But how?
Why?
And why wasn’t the police announcing this properly?

The inspector quickly stepped forward, trying to drag her away from the cameras.

“Madam, please go inside. You're obstructing an investigation.”

“Obstructing?” she screamed. “You are framing my husband! You think we don’t know what happens in these cases? You found a little blood and suddenly he’s a murderer?”

She collapsed against the grill gate, sobbing uncontrollably.
The cameras zoomed in instantly, because grief is always the easiest headline.

The police realized they were losing control of the scene.

“Everyone step back!” the inspector shouted. “No statements at this stage! Ongoing investigation!”

Which was their polite way of saying:
We know more than we’re saying. And we’re not sharing it.

A male reporter whispered to another, “This is it, bro! We found our killer.”

I hated them a little in that moment.

I hated myself too, because deep inside, a voice whispered:

What if he really did?

Not just the murder,
but the other thing too.

What if Diya didn't know the truth about him?

Or worse…
what if she knew, and still defended him?

Before I could think more, an officer grabbed my arm lightly.

"Madam, please leave the premises."

I nodded and stepped back.
Five minutes later, I was walking away with nothing but more questions and the rising noise of media feeding frenzy behind me.

By the time I reached home, the sky had turned a dull pink and the streetlights flickered awake.
It was 6:15 p.m.

My father sat on the sofa, glued to the TV where three different news channels were flashing the same headline:

"TARIQ SYED — PRIME SUSPECT IN DOUBLE MURDER"
"CCTV + BLOOD EVIDENCE FOUND!"
"BIological Father of Victim Accused!"

"Tch," my father muttered. "Always the ex-husband. Never fails."

I sat beside him, still shaken.

The footage they showed wasn't new, Tariq entering the colony.
The anchor's voice was dripping with certainty, even though the investigation was not.

My father didn't notice my expression.
He never did when news was on.

I looked at the TV, then at my father's calm, convinced face. My phone felt heavy in my pocket, containing the voice notes of a seventeen-year-old girl who swore Tariq was under her balcony at the time of the murder.
My journalistic instinct screamed at me to call my editor. *"I have his alibi,"* I could say. It would be the headline of the year. It would save an "innocent" man from a murder charge.
But then I remembered Diya's knuckles, white with fear. I remembered how she defended a forty-year-old man sneaking into the shadows to "comfort" her. If I cleared him of murder, I was handing her back to him. I'd be the one who opened the door for a predator just to satisfy the "Truth."

Is a man truly innocent if he didn't pull the trigger, but was busy stealing a child's peace instead?

Part-5: Silence

Silence-
The deliberate absence of response, information, or acknowledgment. Silence is often mistaken for neutrality or restraint, but in many contexts, it functions as a tool of control used to delay truth, avoid accountability, or protect institutions rather than individuals.

Synonyms-
• Omission
• Non-response
• Suppression
• Withholding
• Quiet complicity

Sentence-
In the days following the crime, silence became the loudest presence, spoken through closed doors, unanswered questions, and carefully chosen words that revealed nothing at all.

Silence is not the absence of sound.
It's the refusal to respond.

I learned that over the next two days.

The police stopped taking questions almost immediately.
"Investigation is ongoing."
"No comments at this stage."
"Please rely on official press notes."

The same three sentences, repeated like a chant, as if saying them often enough would turn uncertainty into order.

When I went to the police station with a formal request for clarification on the blood evidence, the constable at the desk didn't even look up.

"Madam, you'll get information when it's meant to be public."

"When is that?" I asked.

He shrugged.
That shrug told me more than his words.

Because if the case was as clear-cut as the media claimed, they would have spoken loudly.
Certainty likes attention.
Doubt prefers closed doors.

The school followed a different kind of silence.

After the grooming session, the administration suddenly became very careful.
Posters were removed.
The counselor's follow-up session was "postponed indefinitely."
Teachers who had spoken freely two days ago now replied with rehearsed smiles.

"I'm sorry, Riya, we've been advised not to comment further."

"Advised by whom?"

She didn't answer.

Students noticed it too.
Whispers replaced conversations.
Names were dropped mid-sentence and replaced with glances.

Arbab's desk was still empty.
No flowers.
No announcement.
Just an unspoken agreement to step around the absence and move on.

Silence doesn’t erase grief.
It just makes it lonely.

Anha disappeared.

Not literally. Her house was still there, lights occasionally flickering on and off, but socially, she vanished.

She didn’t answer calls.
Didn’t open the door when the police came for routine questioning.
Didn’t attend the colony meeting that everyone else showed up for out of obligation and curiosity.

Neighbours began lowering their voices when passing 47A.

“She hasn’t stepped out once,” someone whispered.
“Lawyers know how to protect themselves,” another replied.

No one mentioned her son.

That silence felt heavier than accusation.

Because grief usually leaks.
Through anger, through tears, through denial.

But Anha’s grief stayed contained.
Compressed.
Like something dangerous waiting for pressure to shift.

I started noticing the gaps.

Small things that didn’t match.

The police said Tariq’s presence near the colony was suspicious —
but no one explained *when* the blood was supposedly transferred to his shirt.

The media said the case was “almost solved”
but no charges were filed.

The school said they were protecting students
but refused to talk about what Arbab had been dealing with.

Everyone was acting like the story was already written.

Yet no one was willing to read from the same page.

Silence is often mistaken for neutrality.

It isn’t.

It’s a choice.

A decision to delay truth long enough for people to stop asking.

And that’s when I understood something uncomfortable:

If this case stayed quiet,
if the right questions weren’t asked soon,
then Tariq would become the villain everyone needed,
and everything else would disappear behind him.

The grooming.
The failures.
The adults who didn’t intervene.
The institutions that preferred order over accountability.

Silence protects systems, not people.

I closed my notebook and underlined a single sentence at the bottom of the page:

What is being hidden is never as dangerous as who is being protected.

I circled the word 'Protected' until the ink bled through the paper. The police were protecting their closure rate. The school was protecting its admissions. And Tariq? Tariq was being protected by the very noise that condemned him, because as long as he was the 'Monster,' no one had to look at the 'Man.'

That night, for the first time since this began,
I stopped trying to make sense of what was being said and started paying attention to what wasn’t.

Part-6: Witness

Witness-
A person who observes an event, behaviour, or pattern, often without participating in or fully understanding its significance. A witness may see something important without realizing its meaning at the time, and their account can remain incomplete, shaped by context, authority, or fear.

Synonyms-
• Observer
• Onlooker
• Bystander
• Eyewitness
• Silent observer

Sentence-
Sometimes the most crucial truths come not from those who act, but from those who simply saw and were never asked what they noticed.

The next day, I got a DM on Instagram from a student who said he studied at Gurudev International School, the same school where Mahendra had taught.

He didn't want to talk in the staff room.

"Can we talk outside?" he asked, eyes flicking nervously toward the corridor.

We sat on a bench near the basketball court, far enough from teachers to feel safe, close enough to look normal. He was in Class 12, tall, but folded inward, the kind of boy who had learned early that being invisible was a form of protection.

"I'm not here to get anyone in trouble," I told him. "I just want to know what you saw."

He nodded, staring at his shoes.

"I didn't think it was… wrong," he said finally. "At least not back then."

"What didn't you think was wrong?" I asked.

He hesitated.

"Sir used to call some students to the art room after school," he said. "Not everyone. Just a few."

"Mahendra Arora?" I asked.

He nodded once.

"It wasn't punishment," he added quickly, like he needed me to understand that.
"More like encouragement. He'd say they had talent. That they understood art better than others."

"And did they?" I asked.

He shrugged.
"Some did. Some didn't. But they all stayed."

"After hours?" I asked.

"Yes."

"How often?"

"Enough that people noticed. But no one questioned it. Art teachers are… different."
He said it like a rule everyone had silently agreed to.

It didn't explain anything.

“Was Arbab ever there?” I asked, carefully.

His jaw tightened.

“Yes.”

“But Arbab didn’t study here,” I said.

“I know,” he replied quickly. “But he was Sir’s son. He’d sometimes sneak in. He never looked uncomfortable. He liked art. And Sir liked him. That’s all.”

That’s all.

The sentence people use when they’re afraid of what comes next.

“Did anyone ever ask questions?” I asked.

He shook his head.

“Why would they? It was school. It was a teacher and his son.”
Then, almost as an afterthought, he added,
“Sometimes there were other boys too… but-”
He stopped.
“That’s all.”

I didn’t push him.

He hadn’t accused anyone.
He hadn’t defended anyone either.

He had only described what he saw.

And sometimes, that’s the most disturbing kind of truth.

When I got home, I barely had time to shut the door before my mother grabbed my arm.

“Where have you been?” she hissed. “Go get ready. Someone is coming to see you.”

“To see me?” I frowned. “Who?”

“You don’t need to know that,” she snapped. “Just wear something decent.”

I looked at her properly then, the tight smile, the forced cheer, the nervous energy.

This wasn’t a guest.

This was an inspection.
(Rishte wale. Of course.)

“I have work,” I said.

“You always have work,” she shot back. “This is important.”

Important to whom?

I went to my room, shut the door, and stared at the window for a long moment.

Ten minutes later, I climbed out.

I left my phone on the bed, partly to avoid tracking, partly because I didn’t want to deal with missed calls and explanations that I wasn’t ready to give.

Outside, the evening air felt like relief.

I didn’t know where I was going until I saw Diya sitting on the steps near the park, knees pulled to her chest, staring into nothing.

“Running away?” she asked when she saw me.

“Temporarily,” I said, sitting beside her.

She smiled faintly.

“They’re trying to get you married, aren’t they?” she said. “I know that look.”

Diya was only seventeen. Her father had threatened to get her married early when he found out about Arbab.
I looked at her, unable to hide it.
Of course she knew that look.

“Not yet,” I sighed. “But they’re warming up.”

She laughed… short, bitter.

“They don’t even wait with girls like me,” she said. “They just decide.”

We sat in silence for a while. This one didn’t feel heavy.

“You know what’s funny?” Diya said.
“Everyone talks about education like it’s freedom. But even educated women are still… handed over.”

She glanced at me.

“Look at you. Right now, I’m nothing. My father can force me into marriage even if it’s illegal. I can’t fight him.”
She paused.
“But you can. And still, you’re trapped.”

I swallowed.

“They use love against you, don’t they? They say that it is for your own good, but then do not ask what you want in life.” she added softly.

I nodded.
A seventeen-year-old had just said out loud what I’d never dared to name.

“My mother works,” I said. “She earns. Thinks. Decides everything. But when it comes to me, she doesn’t trust my decisions. Even if I contribute, I’m still treated like a burden.”

Diya looked at me carefully.

“You don’t look like someone who listens,” she said. “You look like someone who does what she wants.”

“I don’t,” I admitted. “That’s why they panic.”
Then I added, “That’s also why I’m here.”

She smiled, properly, this time.

“I wish I could be like that. Like you some day.”

“You can,” I said. “You just don’t know it yet.”

She leaned her head against the railing.

“Do you think it ever stops?” she asked. “This pressure?”

“No,” I said honestly. “But you learn to name it. And once you name it, it loses some power.”

She was quiet for a long time.

Then she said, “I’m glad you’re around.”

So was I.

We walked back together, the age gap between us shrinking into something irrelevant,
not journalist and subject,
not adult and child.

Just two women learning how early the rules begin.

When I climbed back through my window, my mother was waiting.

“Where were you?” she demanded.

“I went for a walk,” I said.

“At night? Without your phone?” she snapped.

“The family left. Do you know how embarrassing that was? Why don’t you obey us?”

I didn’t answer. Let her anger burn itself out. For the first time since the police tape went up at 47A, I wasn't thinking about blood evidence or ex-husbands. I was thinking about the invisible walls of Rajdhani Enclave.

I was thinking about how easily "I love you" turns into "I own you," and how we are taught to hold our tongues long before the world ever tells us to be quiet.

Part-7: Myth

Myth-
A traditional story used to explain, justify, or give meaning to beliefs, values, and behaviors. Myths often transform acts of power into narratives of destiny, beauty, or honor, allowing uncomfortable truths to survive under the protection of culture and symbolism.

Synonyms-
• Legend
• Fable
• Origin story
• Symbolic narrative
• Cultural justification

Sentence-
Myths endure not because they are harmless, but because they make the unequal appear timeless, and therefore unquestionable.

Another day came and I didn't go looking for answers.
I went looking for context.

Mahendra Arora's art wasn't hidden. It never was.
It was framed, catalogued, praised.

Some of his work still lived on the school website. Others survived only as photographs that were saved by students, parents, colleagues who had once admired the pieces without asking why certain themes returned so insistently.

Men.
Boys.
Gods who loved beautifully.

One name appeared again and again.

Ganymede.

In Greek mythology, Ganymede was a boy of extraordinary beauty. A prince, some versions say. A shepherd in others.
Zeus saw him from Olympus and wanted him.

So, Zeus descended. not as a god, but as an eagle.

He carried the boy away.

Most retellings hesitate only briefly before softening what happened next.
The word *abduction* fades quickly, replaced by admiration.

Ganymede is taken to Mount Olympus.
He is made immortal.
He becomes the cupbearer of the gods.

The myth insists this is an honor.

The paintings agreed.

Mahendra's Zeus was always luminous, muscular, calm, impossibly certain.
His Ganymede was always young. Smooth-skinned. Slender. Still.

Never resisting.
Never afraid.

In one sketch, Zeus's hand rested lightly on the boy's shoulder.
In another, the eagle's wings folded around him, not like restraint, but like shelter.

There was no struggle in these images.
No fear.

Only inevitability.

I scrolled through them slowly, telling myself I was overthinking.
That art borrows faces.
That symbolism doesn’t need accuracy.

And then I stopped.

The boy in one painting had Arbab’s jawline.
The soft curve of his mouth.
The same heavy-lidded eyes that always looked like they were thinking of something he wouldn’t say out loud.

I told myself it was coincidence.

But the more I looked, the harder that lie became.

Different canvases.
Different poses.
The same boy.

Older than a child, younger than a man.
Caught in that precise in-between where admiration feels flattering and power feels invisible.

I felt something cold settle in my stomach.

I found an old exhibition note written by Mahendra himself:

“My work explores love that transcends convention, time, and moral rigidity.”

Love.

That word again.

We have a habit of dressing power in the robes of affection. We turn a predator's reach into 'destiny.' In the art room, the gods are never questioned; their hunger is framed as a lesson, their touch as a blessing. But Arbab wasn't a myth. He was a seventeen-year-old boy in a school uniform.

The gods, after all, are never questioned.
Their desire is portrayed as wisdom.
Their actions, as lessons.

And the boy?

The boy is always silent.

Always grateful.
Always chosen.

The myth never asks whether he wanted to be chosen at all.

I closed the page.

Thought of Arbab, quiet, introverted, always described as “mature for his age.”
Thought of what Diya had said, almost defensively, about an *older woman*, about *dirty talks*, as if repeating the words made them smaller.
Thought of how easily attention becomes oxygen when you don’t feel seen anywhere else.

I didn’t know what to do.

So, I called Anha.

She picked up on the third ring.

“Riya?” Her voice sounded tired. Controlled. Too controlled.

“I need you to do something,” I said. “And I need you to do it right now.”

There was a pause.
“Okay.”

“Can you check Arbab’s phone?”

Another pause. Longer this time.

“Yes,” she said. “I have it.”

I stayed on the line while she moved. I could hear drawers opening, the faint click of a screen unlocking.

“There’s nothing here,” she said after a while. “No chats. Nothing unusual.”

I wasn’t surprised.

“Deleted messages?” I asked.

“Maybe.” she replied quietly. “I am not sure.”

My stomach tightened.

“Check Mahendra’s phone,” I said.

She didn’t respond immediately.

“Riya…” she started.

“Please,” I said. “Just check.”

I heard her inhale sharply, like she was bracing herself.
Then silence.
Then the faint sound of tapping.

“There are no messages here either,” she said.

“Any other accounts?” I asked. “Any secondary profiles?”

Another pause.

Then,

“There’s one,” she said slowly. “An Instagram account I didn’t know about.”

“What’s the name?”

She swallowed. I could hear it.

“Urmila.”

The name sat between us, absurd and heavy.

“Open it,” I said.

She did.

I heard her breath change.

“Oh.”

Just that.
Not a scream.
Not a gasp.

“Oh.”

“Anha?” I said gently.

“There are messages,” she said. “With Arbab.”

I closed my eyes.

“What kind of messages?” I asked, even though I already knew the answer.

She didn’t respond immediately.

“They… talk,” she said finally. “Too much. Too closely.”
Another pause.
“At times when Arbab should have been in school. At times when Mahendra should have been teaching.”

I felt cold. Anha’s voice sounded like she was crying.

“There are things written here,” she continued, her voice flattening. “Things an adult should never say to a child. Things a child shouldn’t know how to respond to.”

I didn’t ask her to read them out.
I didn’t need to.

“And sometimes,” she added, barely audible, “they mention moments when I was asleep.”

That was when it hit her.

I heard it, not in words, but in the way her breathing broke.

This wasn’t suspicion anymore.
This wasn’t theory.

This was proof.

A long silence followed.

“I didn’t know,” Anha whispered. “I swear to you, I didn’t know.”

I believed her.

Because the horror in her voice wasn’t performative.
It was raw. Uncontained.

“Diya told me Arbab was in touch with an older woman. This wasn’t an older woman,” I said quietly. “This was him.”

She didn’t answer for a while.

“Can I see you tomorrow?”, she asked.

“Yes, please… Come at my home anytime, you’re always welcome.”, I said, trying to comfort her.

There are moments when the truth doesn’t arrive loudly.
It seeps in.
Slowly.
Irreversibly.

When I hung up, my hands were shaking.

Because suddenly, everything made sense.

The art.
The myths.
The secrecy.
The silence.

And Arbab, caught between love and authority, praise and control, never stood a chance.

Some crimes don’t look violent when they’re happening.

They look like attention.
Like care.
Like trust.

And by the time they reveal themselves for what they are,
they’ve already taken everything.

Part-8: Confession

Confession-
A formal or informal admission of involvement, guilt, or responsibility. A confession does not always emerge from remorse; it can arise from fear, justification, exhaustion, or the belief that one's actions were necessary, inevitable, or deserved.

Synonyms-
• Admission
• Disclosure
• Acknowledgment
• Avowal
• Revelation

Sentence-
The confession did not arrive as an apology, but as an explanation—carefully arranged, emotionally justified, and spoken as if the truth itself could be reshaped by intention.

Anha didn’t cry when she started talking.

That was the first thing that scared me.

She sat across from me, hands folded neatly in her lap, eyes fixed somewhere just past my shoulder, like she was addressing a version of me that already knew everything.

“I thought it was Tariq,” she said.

No hesitation.
No apology.

“The CCTV footage made sense. Him roaming near the colony at night, refusing to explain why he was there. Men like him don’t need reasons; they create situations.”

I didn’t interrupt.

“At that point,” she continued, “I didn’t want justice. I wanted certainty. Something solid enough that no one could defend him.”

She looked at me then.

“You know what kind of man he is, don’t you?”

I nodded slowly.

“He has always been like this,” she said. “Younger girls. Vulnerable ones. Ones who think attention is affection.”

Her mouth twisted into something between disgust and bitterness.

“And the irony,” she added, almost laughing, “is that he pretended to be moral.”

I frowned. “What do you mean?”

Anha exhaled sharply.

“There was a girl. Nineteen. In college. Muskan.”

The name felt heavy the moment she said it.

“He was involved with her for months,” Anha continued. “Then one day, he found out she had a boyfriend before him. That she had kissed him before.”

Her lips pressed together.

“He called her names. Slut. Characterless. Told her she was ‘used.’”

I felt my stomach turn.

“A man who chases minors,” I said quietly, “slut-shaming a woman for having a past.”

Anha nodded. “That’s who he is.”

She paused before continuing.

“Muskan didn’t take it quietly,” she said. “She was furious. Hurt. Humiliated.”

“Why would she help you?” I asked.

Anha looked away.

“Because she didn’t care anymore,” she said. “She was an orphan, had no family. No one to protect. No one to answer to. She told me once, ‘If the world already thinks I’m bad, what difference does it make?’”

That sentence sat between us like a bruise.

“She knew about Diya,” Anha continued. “About other girls too. Younger ones. She wasn’t shocked, she was angry. Angry enough to want him destroyed.”

I swallowed. “So, you used that, even though you knew it may ruin her in future? A nineteen-year-old girl who didn’t know any better, you made her an accomplice in this crime?”

“Yes.”

She didn’t deny it.

“I knew his habits. His affairs. His carelessness. I knew Muskan had access to him, to his clothes, his phone, his routine. She could easily bring it to me, and then take it back to him. I used blood…”

Her voice became quiet for a moment.

“We didn’t invent anything,” she said after a pause. “We only rearranged what already existed.”

I stared at her.

“You framed him for murder.”

“Yes.”

She said it plainly.

“Because in my head, he was already guilty. And he still is. Yes, Mahendra did something unforgivable, but he wouldn’t murder my child. And he himself was murdered too.” she continued. “I know it was Tariq. He deserved it.”

“And Muskan?” I asked.

Anha’s eyes hardened.

“She knew the risk,” she said. “I didn’t force her. I didn’t lie to her. I told her exactly what this would mean.”

“What did you tell her?” I asked.

“That Tariq would finally pay,” Anha replied. “That men like him never stop unless something stops them.”

She leaned back slightly.

“She didn’t ask for protection. She didn’t ask for reassurance. She asked me one thing.”

“What?” I asked.

“That if it worked,” Anha said, “I wouldn’t pretend to be sorry for him.”

Her voice didn’t waver.

“She said she was tired of being the only one who carried consequences.”

I felt a chill move through me.

“So, you believed he killed them,” I said carefully. “You believed Tariq murdered Mahendra and Arbab.”

“Yes,” Anha said immediately. “I still do.”

“But you didn’t see him,” I said. “You didn’t hear anything. There was no confession.”

She smiled then, not warmly. Not cruelly either.
With certainty.

“Men like him don’t need witnesses,” she said. “Their patterns are evidence.”

“That’s not how the law works,” I said.

“No,” she agreed. “That’s how survival works.”

She folded her hands again, as composed as when she had started.

“When the police showed me the footage,” she continued, “everything aligned. The timing. The secrecy. His refusal to explain why he was there.”

“He said he was roaming,” I said.

She scoffed.

“At one in the morning?” she asked. “Near my house? A man who never respected boundaries suddenly wandering?”

Her jaw tightened.

“And even if he didn’t kill them,” she said, lowering her voice, “how many girls would he have ruined if he walked free?”

I didn’t answer.

Because I knew the danger of that question.

“You see,” Anha went on, “I didn’t think I was lying. I thought I was correcting an imbalance.”

She looked directly at me now.

“Society is very good at protecting men like Tariq. I simply helped it fail for once.”

My chest felt tight.

“You understand,” she said. It wasn’t a question.

“I understand your anger,” I replied slowly. “But anger isn’t truth.”

Anha’s expression shifted, just slightly.

“Truth,” she said, “is a luxury for people who haven’t lost everything.”

There was a pause.

Then she added, quieter, almost to herself:

“My child is dead.”

The room went still.

“I didn’t have the patience to wait for justice,” she continued. “I wanted assurance. Finality.”

She looked at her hands.

“And Tariq was the only man whose guilt felt obvious enough to carry that weight.”

I realized then what terrified me most.

Anha wasn’t lying to cover herself.
She wasn’t manipulating facts she knew were false.

She genuinely believed this version of events.

And belief, when reinforced by grief, doesn't bend easily.

I stood up slowly.

"Anha," I said, "if you're wrong-"

She looked up sharply.

"I'm not," she said.

Not angrily.
Not defensively.

With the calm of someone who has already closed the door on doubt.

I left with the unsettling certainty that whatever the truth was,
Anha had already decided who deserved it.

And at that moment in time,
for her, it didn't matter.

Part-9: Fracture

Fracture-
A break or crack caused by pressure, impact, or stress. Fractures are often invisible at first, forming quietly before suddenly giving way. In emotional contexts, a fracture marks the moment when a belief collapses and cannot be repaired in its original shape.

Synonyms-
• Break
• Rupture
• Collapse
• Splintering
• Irreversible shift

Sentence-
The fracture did not arrive with violence, but with understanding—and once it formed, nothing could be held the same way again.

Tariq was arrested the next morning.

Not dramatically.
No resistance.
No shouting.

Just handcuffs, lowered eyes, and the familiar choreography of police officers escorting a man the media had already decided was guilty.

By noon, every channel was running the same image.

Prime Suspect Taken Into Custody.

By evening, the story had simplified itself.

A bad man.
A violent act.
Case almost closed.

Diya watched none of it.

She was in the school corridor when it happened.

She hadn't meant to listen.

She stood near the staircase, pretending to read a novel, waiting for the bell to ring. Two girls from the senior wing were behind her, talking without bothering to lower their voices.

One of them laughed.

"Men like him always do that," the girl said casually. "Make you feel special first. That's their thing."

"Who?" the other asked.

"Tariq. Obviously. He says the same lines to everyone. He said it to Shreya's sister too, Muskan didi. It's like he's copying and pasting emotions."

Diya felt her stomach tighten.

The first girl continued, bored.

"Muskan didi was furious when she found out he was talking to school girls as well. As if she was any different."

They laughed again.

Something cold moved through Diya's chest.

She turned slightly, enough to see them.

“You mean… younger girls?” one of them asked.

“Yeah,” the first replied. “He likes them young. Easier to impress. Easier to control.”

The bell rang.

Neither of them noticed Diya standing there, frozen.

She walked to the washroom on autopilot.

The mirror felt too bright.
Too honest.

Her hands were shaking.

He makes girls feel special first.

The words replayed again and again, stripped of the warmth she had wrapped around them.

The late-night talks.
The reassurance.
The way he listened when no one else did.

Special.

Her body reacted before her mind could catch up.

Nausea rose sharply.
She pressed her palm against her mouth, breathing hard.

She wasn’t chosen.

She was selected.

That evening, after she reached home, her phone buzzed.

A notification she hadn’t meant to open.

Someone had forwarded screenshots in a group chat: the messages Muskan had posted and deleted quickly, but not quickly enough.

“These kids think attention = love. It’s almost funny.”
“They fall so easily.”

Diya’s vision blurred.

Her throat burned.

She locked herself in her room and slid down against the door, breathing hard, trying not to cry out loud.

Shame came first.

Hot.
Suffocating.

Then anger.

Sharp.
Cleansing.
Terrifying.

She felt used—not in the way people warned you about, but in a way no one had taught her how to name.

She had defended him.
Argued for him.
Believed him.

And he hadn't even remembered her separately.

When she found me later that evening, her eyes looked different.

Clearer.
Hollowed out.

"He lied," she said, without preamble.

I didn't ask who.

"I thought…" Her voice cracked. "I thought I mattered."

I stayed silent.

"They all say the same thing, don't they?" she whispered.
"About girls like me. That we're stupid. That we asked for it."

"No," I said firmly. "They say it about themselves."

She swallowed.

"I feel disgusting," she said. "And angry. And stupid. All at once."

"That's what betrayal does," I said. "Not the truth."

She nodded slowly.

Something in her had broken, not loudly, not publicly, but completely.

The version of Diya who believed attention meant care was gone.

What replaced her was quieter.
Heavier.
More dangerous.

Because now she knew.

And knowledge, once it fractures belief, cannot be undone.

Part-10: Pattern

Pattern-
A recurring sequence of behaviours, events, or structures that, when observed together, reveal an underlying system rather than isolated incidents. Patterns often become visible only after enough repetition forces recognition.

Synonyms-
• Repetition
• Sequence
• Configuration
• Framework
• Recurring structure

Sentence-
When individual events refused to make sense, the pattern they formed became impossible to ignore.

I hadn’t written a report for this case for a long while.

Not because I didn’t want to, but because they demand distance, and distance had become a luxury I no longer trusted myself with.

They require facts without emotion.
Patterns without sympathy.
People reduced to variables.

For a long time, I had believed that turning lives into documents was a kind of violence in itself.

But this case refused to stay personal.
It kept arranging itself.

So that night, I opened a new file.

Not an article.
Not a draft.
Not another field report.

A case study.

And I knew, even before I typed the title, that this would be the last one I ever wrote.

CASE STUDY: RAJDHANI ENCLAVE DOUBLE HOMICIDE

Prepared by: Riya
Role: Independent journalist
Status: Investigation ongoing
Purpose: Documentation of facts, patterns, and admitted actions as known at the time of writing
Ethical note: Minors involved. No explicit material recorded or reproduced.

I. BACKGROUND

On the night between approximately 1:00–2:00 a.m., two individuals were found dead inside their residence at Rajdhani Enclave:

- **Mahendra Arora - adult male, art teacher**
- **Arbab Arora - minor male, student, Mahendra’s stepson**

Police arrived in the early morning hours.
No forced entry was reported.

The crime immediately attracted public and media attention due to its domestic nature and the involvement of a minor.

II. INITIAL SUSPECTS & INVESTIGATION

1. Colony Security Guard

• CCTV footage showed him present earlier in the night
• Later confirmed asleep during estimated time of deaths
• Cleared due to lack of opportunity

2. Tariq Syed (Biological father of Arbab)

• CCTV footage placed him near the colony on the same night
• Initially refused to disclose reason for presence
• Later admitted he was there to meet a minor (Diya), who lived in the colony

Outcome:
Tariq was declared prime suspect by police and media despite lack of direct evidence at the time.

III. MEDIA & PUBLIC NARRATIVE

• Tariq labeled "killer" before charges were filed
• Headlines emphasized moral character over forensic clarity
• Media certainty preceded legal confirmation

Observation:
Public narrative stabilized before investigation did.

IV. FORENSIC DEVELOPMENTS (LATER-STAGE)

Evidence introduced after Tariq was publicly framed as suspect:

• Blood found on Tariq's shirt
• Blood claimed to match Mahendra and Arbab
• Fingerprints found on the knife (weapon)

Irregularities noted:
• Evidence not present in initial scene documentation
• Chain of custody unclear
• Discovery followed narrative, not investigation

V. TARIQ SYED - BEHAVIORAL PROFILE

Known behavior patterns:
• Repeated relationships with significantly younger women
• Emotional manipulation framed as support
• Moral hypocrisy (slut-shaming adult partners while engaging with minors)

Key associations:
• Diya — 17, school student (emotional grooming)
• Muskan Batra — 19, college student (romantic involvement)

Conclusion:
Tariq exhibits predatory behavior.
However, behavioral guilt ≠ proof of homicide.

VI. MUSKAN BATRA - ROLE & MOTIVATION

Profile:
• Age: 19
• College student
• Former partner of Tariq

Trigger event:
• Tariq ended relationship after discovering Muskan had a prior boyfriend
• He slut-shamed her and questioned her "character"

Aftermath:
• Emotional breakdown
• Extreme resentment toward Tariq

• Expressed hostility toward younger girls he interacted with
• Language mocking minors ("attention = love")

Access:
• Access to Tariq's clothes, phone, and routine (Later used by Anha)

VII. DIYA - MINOR SUBJECT

Initial stance:
• Defended Tariq
• Believed emotional connection to be genuine

Turning point:
• Overheard peers discussing Tariq's repetitive behavior
• Learned of Muskan's existence and contempt
• Realized she was not "chosen" but one of many

Impact:
• Psychological fracture
• Shift from defense to recognition

Conclusion:
Realization occurred through betrayal, not adult instruction.

VIII. MAHENDRA ARORA - POSTHUMOUS REASSESSMENT

Public identity:
• Art teacher
• Viewed as intellectual and progressive

Artistic themes:
• Zeus and Ganymede
• Power romanticized as destiny
• Youth depicted as grateful and silent

Behavioral indicators:
• After-hours access to students
• "Special attention" to select boys
• Art room usage beyond school hours

Digital evidence:
• Arbab's phone: messages deleted
• Mahendra's phone:
– Fake Instagram account under pseudonym "Urmila"
– Chats with Arbab discovered
– Emotional and sexually suggestive language (not detailed)
– Messages sent during school hours and late nights
– References to interactions while Anha was asleep

Conclusion:
Mahendra groomed Arbab using authority, symbolism, and secrecy.

IX. ANHA - CONFESSION & ROLE

Profile:
• Lawyer
• Emotionally dependent on Mahendra
• Mother of Arbab

Belief at the time:
• Convinced Tariq murdered Mahendra and Arbab
• Based belief on CCTV presence and Tariq's history

Motivation:
• Desire for certainty and finality
• Protection of her son's dignity
• Emotional collapse after deaths

Admitted actions:
• Collaborated with Muskan to frame Tariq
• Used Muskan's access to Tariq's belongings
• Facilitated:
– Blood transfer to Tariq's shirt

Critical note:
At the time of framing, Anha did NOT know about Mahendra's grooming of Arbab.

She believed:
• Mahendra was innocent
• Tariq was guilty
• Framing was corrective justice

X. INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE

School:
• Initial acknowledgment
• Withdrawal of counselling sessions
• Silence framed as "student protection"

Police:
• Delayed forensic transparency
• Focus on convenient suspect
• Failure to question evidence timing

Media:
• Sensationalism
• No accountability for premature conclusions

XI. FINAL PATTERN IDENTIFIED

Recurring elements across all actors:

• Authority misused as care
• Attention mistaken for affection
• Youth bearing responsibility for adult harm
• Systems favoring closure over truth
• Women weaponized by men, then criminalized
• Children paying the highest price

XII. CONCLUSION (NON-JUDICIAL)

This case is not about a single perpetrator.

It is about:
• Power protected by silence
• Harm disguised as love
• Justice distorted by grief
• Truth delayed by convenience

PERSONAL NOTE (UNPUBLISHED)

This will be my last case study.

Not because I am done investigating,
but because this document required me to turn lives into evidence,
and I am no longer willing to do that without consequence.

Patterns can explain systems.
They cannot heal the people broken by them.

This case deserves truth.
Handled carefully.
Without spectacle.
Without shortcuts.

Part-11: Truth

Truth-
That which is factually accurate, verifiable, and complete. Truth is often assumed to bring justice, clarity, or relief; however, in practice, it may only expose damage without repairing it, leaving consequences unresolved and safety unchanged.

Synonyms-
• Fact
• Reality
• Disclosure
• Revelation
• Veracity

Sentence-
The truth did not arrive to save anyone; it arrived only to stand, unmoving, after everything else had already collapsed.

The truth didn’t arrive all at once.
It arrived in pieces: documents, timestamps, accounts that finally aligned when placed next to each other without fear or favour.

I released my report.

Not on social media.
Not through leaks.
Formally. Carefully.

With names where they were necessary, and silence where they were ethical.

I handed the *Urmila* account to the police.

The messages were never reproduced.
They didn’t need to be.
The timestamps alone were enough.

Tariq Syed was released.

Not declared innocent.
Just no longer legally guilty of murder.

The blood evidence was ruled compromised.
The fingerprints inconclusive.
The chain of custody broken beyond repair.

The case was closed without a conviction.

The media never used the word *wrong*.

They used *developments*.
New angles.
A shift in the investigation.

By the next week, Tariq’s name stopped trending.

He walked out of custody unchanged.

Zainab divorced him quietly a year later, after discovering what everyone else eventually did; that there had always been someone else. There always was.

Another chilling truth surfaced then:
if a man can replace his first wife *for* you, he can replace *you* for someone else too.

No one knows where Tariq is now.

That is how men like him survive.

They don’t fall.
They disperse.

Anha was arrested.

So was Muskan.

The framing was proven — not because of intention, but because of alignment.

Access.
Timing.
Opportunity.

Muskan was nineteen when she agreed to help.

Old enough to be charged.
Young enough to have been used.

Anha never denied her role.

She didn’t cry in court either.

She spoke clearly. Precisely.
Like a lawyer who understood consequences, but could no longer live inside them.

She learned the truth about Mahendra while in custody.

That he had groomed her son.
That the man she had trusted had already destroyed everything she thought she was protecting.

Two weeks later, Anha was found dead in her cell.

The report said *suicide*.
The file closed quickly.

She had lived by the law.
Broken it for certainty.

And when certainty collapsed, there was no floor left beneath her.

The colony reacted the way colonies always do.

Shock.
Outrage.
Silence.

Mahendra Arora’s art was removed from school walls.

Archived.
Taken down without ceremony.

The same institution that once praised his “bold themes” now refused to speak his name.

Gurudev International School shut down the following academic year.

Official reasons were financial.

Everyone knew better.

Arbab was mentioned briefly.

Then less.
Then not at all.

After a while, even the most horrifying stories fade into traffic noise.

Muskan served her sentence.

She emerged quieter.

Years later, she met someone her age.

Ayush.

He didn’t rescue her.
He didn’t redeem her.

He was simply kind.

Sometimes that is enough to begin again.

Diya went to college.

Against her father’s wishes, she chose Automobile Engineering.

She fought emotionally, not legally.

Cried.
Withdrew.
Threatened to disappear.

Eventually, she won.

She studies hard.
Keeps her distance.
Trusts carefully.

She stays away from men.

Not out of fear, but out of choice.

Trauma doesn't always look like weakness.
Sometimes it looks like restraint.

I quit my job.

Not dramatically.
No resignation letter that mattered.

I wrote one final piece.

The headline read:

"The Predator in the Art Room: A Story of Two Truths and No Justice."

Then I closed my laptop.

I opened a daycare six months later.

Small.
Bright.
Loud.

Children run there without knowing why I watch so closely.
Why I never look away.

My parents stopped talking about marriage.

Not because they understood, but because I was too tired to argue, and too busy to explain.

Sometimes survival looks like withdrawal.
Sometimes it looks like choosing life where you still can.

The official records list the case as *resolved*.

No further investigation was pursued.
No trial for the murders ever took place.

Mahendra Arora and Arbab's deaths were filed under *closed matters*; their cause acknowledged, their responsibility unresolved.

No one was convicted of killing them.
No name was written where the word *killer* should have been.

In the end, the truth exposed many crimes, but not the one that started everything.

And so the murders remain what most crimes eventually become in this city:

Unsolved.
Unclaimed.
And quietly absorbed into statistics.

The killer was never found.
Never known.

Only the damage was.

And the truth didn’t make the world safer.

It didn’t save everyone.
It didn’t punish everyone who deserved it.

It only stood there-

unmoved,
undeniable,
cold.

And that was all it ever promised to do.